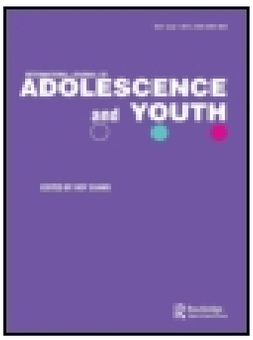

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Exploring academic teasing: predictors and outcomes of teasing for making mistakes in classrooms

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ABSTRACT

People in ideal learning environments recognize the value of making mistakes and welcome them. However, the reality in many classrooms is that students are ridiculed by their peers for making mistakes. This paper explores academic teasing in schools, i.e. making fun of others for making mistakes. Using Tripod student survey data from spring 2017, this paper demonstrates the prevalence of academic teasing in a large, diverse and urban district in the Southern United States. Additionally, using Tripod data from 2012–15, this study tests potential predictors and outcomes of academic teasing. Analyses apply hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). Results indicate that some students of color are significantly more exposed to academic teasing than White students, and that academic teasing is a significant predictor of students' hiding and holding back academic effort. Furthermore, teachers with better teaching skills have less academic teasing in their classrooms, controlling for student body composition. Implications are discussed.

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Ethnicity; teaching; socioeconomic status; teasing; bullying; hierarchical linear modeling

Introduction

Bullying behavior can come in physical, verbal, or relational forms (Kuntsche et al., 2006; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000). One form of verbal bullying is academic teasing, which occurs when students ridicule their peers for making mistakes. Even though there are strong theoretical reasons to believe that this form of bullying comes with severe negative consequences for students, as other forms of bullying do (Hyman, 2006; Kaminski, 2009; Ross, 1996), empirical research on the phenomenon is virtually non-existent. This is despite the fact that psychometric measures of academic teasing exist in contemporary student surveys (e.g. A guide to Tripod's 7Cs framework, 2016; Thompson, Cattarin, Fowler, & Fisher, 2010).

In addition to showing the prevalence of academic teasing in a Southern U.S. public school district, this study explores how the phenomenon might be an obstacle to positive developmental outcomes. Furthermore, it draws on the Tripod 7Cs framework of effective teaching to test whether teaching skills are significant predictors of academic teasing. The study results suggest that it is important for education leaders and bullying researchers to pay closer attention to academic teasing.

Consequences of bullying and teasing

Research indicates that bullying can be harmful for everyone involved, including victims, bystanders, and bullies themselves. It has been associated with higher levels of stress (Hyman, 2006), depression (Holt et al., 2015; Kaminski, 2009; Kim & Leventhal, 2008; Klomek, Sourander, & Gould,

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2008), anxiety (Olweus, 1993; Ross, 1996), and suicidal ideation (Holt et al., 2015; Kaminski, 2009; Kim & Leventhal, 2008; Klomek et al., 2008). Bullying also predicts lower academic achievement (Barth, Dunlap, & Dane, 2004; Mah, 2009; Ponzo, 2013; Strøm, 2013), less college going, and lower adult income (Crosnoe, 2011). It can be particularly harmful when adults – such as teachers, school administrators, and parents – underestimate its prevalence and fail to protect victims (Newgent, Lounsbery, & Keller, 2009).

Research on malicious teasing behavior reveals similar findings as research on bullying. Such teasing negatively predicts student perceptions of their academic self, which in turn predicts less academic engagement and achievement (Lee, Jones, & Day, 2017; Ma, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009). Similarly, more teasing is a predictor of lower schoolwide passing rates on state-mandated achievement tests (Lacey & Cornell, 2013) and higher drop-out rates (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013). Teasing also affects students' feelings of safety, which can lead to lower participation rates in school activities (Mehta, Cornell, & Gregory, 2013). A drop in social interactions reduces practice time for social-emotional skills with peers, which in turn can lead to social-emotional skill deficiencies (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

One explanation for why malicious teasing predicts less academic engagement and achievement might be that high-teasing climates lead to self-sabotaging behaviors among adolescents, such as hiding and holding back academic effort at school (Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, & Friedlander, 2015). According to this theory, students tend to engage in such behaviors due to peer pressure: 'Fear of social repercussions can lead students to behave publicly in ways that they privately disapprove of' (Ferguson, 2016, p. 36). In support of this theory, previous research has found that the link between teasing and negative behavior is mediated by frequent social comparing among youth (Schaefer & Blodgett Salafia, 2014).

Causes of bullying and teasing

A wide range of individual factors have been found to predict bullying behavior among students, such as socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, gender, academic ability, and narcissism (Dietrich & Ferguson, 2019; Espelage, Mebane, & Swearer, 2004; Fanti & Henrich, 2015; Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Reijntjes et al., 2016; Tippett & Wolke, 2014). However, individual characteristics do not operate out of context; instead, they often interact with contextual factors. For example, socially stigmatized students, such as those with low academic achievement or from low-SES backgrounds, have higher levels of social status insecurity (Søndergaard, 2012) and lower levels of self-esteem (Tsaousis, 2016) than their peers, both of which predict higher bullying engagement (Dietrich & Ferguson, 2019).

Another context factor impacting individual characteristics is school climate. A meta-analysis of 153 studies, which defines positive school climate as the perceived fair treatment of students by teachers, finds it to be the strongest among all tested predictors of bullying (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010); mixed-methods research confirms these results (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011). The same meta-analysis (Cook et al., 2010) also finds that the student body composition in schools in terms of gender, SES, and ethnicity is a significant predictor of bullying.

Empirical evidence on the causes of teasing point in the same direction as research on the causes of bullying. Significant correlations have been found between students' teasing behavior towards peers and a variety of context-dependent individual characteristics (Pawluk, 1989). For example, higher-status individuals – seen as more popular or respected by their peers – have been found to tease more often (Emerson, 1964; Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001; Savin-Williams, 1977; Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991) and more aggressively (Keltner, Young, Heerey, Oemig, & Monarch, 1998; Kraus et al., 2014) than their lower-status peers. Another study found that gender moderates the relationship between social status and teasing (Kraus et al., 2014), suggesting that higher-status boys are more likely to engage in malevolent forms of teasing than higher-status girls. These findings are supported by observational research (Voss, 1997).

At the school-level, authoritative discipline policies and practices (Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Konold et al., 2014), and strict but fair enforcement of school rules in combination with positive student-teacher relationships predict less teasing (Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2015).

Study purpose

Motivated by the lack of research on academic teasing – defined as teasing for making mistakes in the classroom – this study explores potential causes and consequences of the phenomenon. In line with previous research on bullying and teasing behavior in schools, academic teasing is hypothesized to be predicted by contextual factors, including teaching practices and the student body composition in terms of SES, gender, and ethnicity. Similarly, it is expected that the presence of academic teasing in classrooms predicts negative behavior among students, including hiding or holding back academic effort.

Methods

Participants

This study uses de-identified secondary data based on student surveys collected by Tripod Education Partners, Inc. These data were chosen because they include measurements for academic teasing, teaching styles, negative student behavior, and a wide range of student background characteristics. One of two datasets used in this study is from a large, urban, and ethnically diverse public school district in the Southern United States from 2017, which contains 45 middle schools. It was chosen because it contains the most recent data on academic teasing available from Tripod Education Partners, and therefore provides the opportunity of showing timely results of the phenomenon. Unfortunately, these most recent Tripod data do not contain all items required for the multivariate regression analyses of this study (i.e. SES and negative behavior items). Missing survey items in Tripod datasets are not unusual because some schools and districts opt for shorter versions of the Tripod student survey, for reasons such as resource shortages, time constraints, and privacy concerns among parents. Consequently, this study also uses an older dataset from 2012–15 for regression analyses. With 1,574 middle schools in 86 U.S. school districts it is particularly large and contains many districts that used the most comprehensive version of the Tripod student survey.

The analytic sample in both datasets is composed of middle school students (6th-8th grade) from the United States. Although evidence shows that bullying behavior begins as early as kindergarten and continues throughout high school, middle school students are the focus of this study because bullying tends to peak in middle school (Goldbaum, 2007). Table 1 provides descriptive statistics of the student body composition in the 2017 and 2012–15 Tripod datasets.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the student body composition in the two data sets that were used for the study.

	2017 Data Set	2012–15 Data Set
White	7%	29%
Black	58%	25%
Latino	11%	10%
Asian	2%	6%
Multi-ethnic	19%	23%
Other ethnicity	3%	7%
At least 100 books at home	20%	32%
At least one computer at home	53%	58%
At least one parent has a college degree	-	28%
Percent with a father at home	48%	60%
Percent parents who speak a foreign language at least half of the time	29%	28%
Percent male students	47%	49%
Total number of schools	46	1,704
Total number of students	16,890	427,955

Measures

Academic teasing

The key outcome variable of interest in this study is academic teasing. At the middle school level, the item reads: 'In this class, students get teased for making mistakes.' The survey item is measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from totally untrue to totally true. For the regression analyses, it is standardized around the group mean. An analysis of the variable's criterion validity can be found in Appendix A.

Teaching effectiveness

The 7Cs framework captures the central components of effective teaching. They are based on the Tripod student survey and include seven dimensions: Care, Confer, Captivate, Clarify, Consolidate, Challenge, and Classroom Management (A guide to Tripod's 7Cs framework, 2016). The Tripod 7Cs framework's reliability and validity at the classroom level have been confirmed (Cantrell & Kane, 2013; Polikoff, 2015).

Care is a 3-item scale and 'captures the extent to which teachers demonstrate warmth and emotional support'. A sample item is 'My teacher seems to know if something is bothering me.' It has a Cronbach's alpha of .78. Confer is a 3-item scale and 'describes the extent to which teachers encourage and value students' ideas and input'. A sample item is 'My teacher wants us to share our thoughts.' It has a Cronbach's alpha of .77. Captivate is a 4-item scale and 'assesses the extent to which teachers spark and maintain student interest in learning'. A sample item is 'My teacher makes lessons interesting.' It has a Cronbach's alpha of .85. Clarify is a 9-item scale and 'captures the extent to which teachers explain clearly, check for understanding, and resolve confusion'. A sample item is 'My teacher knows when the class understands and when we do not.' It has a Cronbach's alpha of .89. Consolidate is a 3-item scale and 'describes the extent to which teachers help students integrate and synthesize key ideas'. A sample item is 'My teacher takes time to summarize what we learn each day.' It has a Cronbach's alpha of .74. Challenge is a 5-item scale and 'assesses the extent to which teachers press students for effort and rigorous thinking'. A sample item is 'My teacher asks students to explain more about answers they give.' It has a Cronbach's alpha of .79. Classroom Management is a 7-item scale and 'captures the extent to which teachers foster orderly, respectful, and on-task student behavior'. A sample item is 'My classmates behave the way my teacher wants them to.' It has a Cronbach's alpha of .82.

Self-sabotaging student behavior

Measures of students' self-sabotaging behavior include hiding academic effort and holding back academic effort. For hiding effort, the Tripod survey asks students the question: 'Sometimes I pretend I'm not trying hard in this class, when I really am.' For holding back academic effort, the Tripod survey asks students the question: 'I sometimes hold back from doing my best in this class, because of what others might say or think.' In addition, students also report on their perceived peer pressure. The survey question is: 'I do things I don't want to do because of pressure from other students.' All three items are measured on five-point Likert scales ranging from totally untrue to totally true.

Student body composition

Measures of student body composition include variables for ethnic composition (percent White, Black, Latino, Asian, and other), gender composition, and socioeconomic status (number of books and computers at home, highest parental education, frequency of speaking a foreign language at home, and having a father at home).

Analyses

This study uses descriptive statistics and hierarchical linear regression modeling (HLM) to test the predictive power of key variables of interest. HLM-analyses are required for unbiased estimates because the data are nested: Classrooms within schools, and schools within districts. In the analyses of this paper, key independent and dependent variables of interest vary between models. All HLM-analyses use the 2012–15 dataset. All continuous variables are standardized around the classroom-level grand mean.

Equation (1) depicts the models at level-1 (classroom-level):

$$Y_{ijk} = \beta_{0jk} + \sum \beta_{pjk} X_{pjk} + r_{ijk} \quad (1)$$

In this equation Y_{ijk} depicts the outcome variable measured for case *i* nested within the *j*th school (level-2), nested within the *k*th district (level-3). β_{0jk} is the intercept, β_{pjk} the sum of level-1 coefficients, and X_{pjk} the sum of all corresponding level-1 predictors. The random error is depicted as r_{ijk}.

Equations (2) and (3) depict the models at level-2 (school-level):

$$\beta_{pjk} = \gamma_{p0k} \quad (2)$$

$$\beta_{0jk} = \gamma_{00k} + u_{0jk} \quad (3)$$

Equations (4) and (5) depict the models at level-3 (district-level):

$$\gamma_{p0k} = \gamma_{p00} \quad (4)$$

$$\gamma_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + u_{00k} \quad (5)$$

All *p* independent variables are held constant at the school- and district-levels as depicted in Equations (2) and (4), respectively. However, the classroom-level constant β_{0jk} is allowed to vary at the school- and district-levels, as depicted by the random factors u_{0jk} (level-2) and u_{00k} (level-3) in Equations (3) and (5), respectively.

Results

Prevalence rates of academic teasing

Figure 1 demonstrates that there is a great deal of teasing for making mistakes in middle schools. At the 50th percentile, 33% of students report at least some academic teasing. At the 90th percentile, approximately one in two students report teasing, compared to approximately one in six students at the 10th percentile.

Academic teasing, student ethnicity, and peer pressure

The results of the descriptive statistics also suggest that students' ethnic background determines exposure to academic teasing. Figure 2 demonstrates that in the 2017 data, for example, Black students make up 70% of the student body in schools with the most teasing (those in the top quintile) but only 38% of the student body in the quintile of schools with the least teasing. In contrast, White students make up 19% of the student body in schools with the lowest teasing rates and only one percent in schools with the highest teasing rates.

A multivariate HLM-analysis using the 2012–15 data confirms that ethnicity is a strong predictor of academic teasing, controlling for other student body composition (Model 1, Table 2). Academic teasing is much more prevalent in classrooms with higher ratios of Black students (1.17 standard deviation, $p < .001$), multi-ethnic students (0.64 standard deviation, $p < .001$), or students of the *other ethnicity*-category (0.90 standard deviation, $p < .001$).

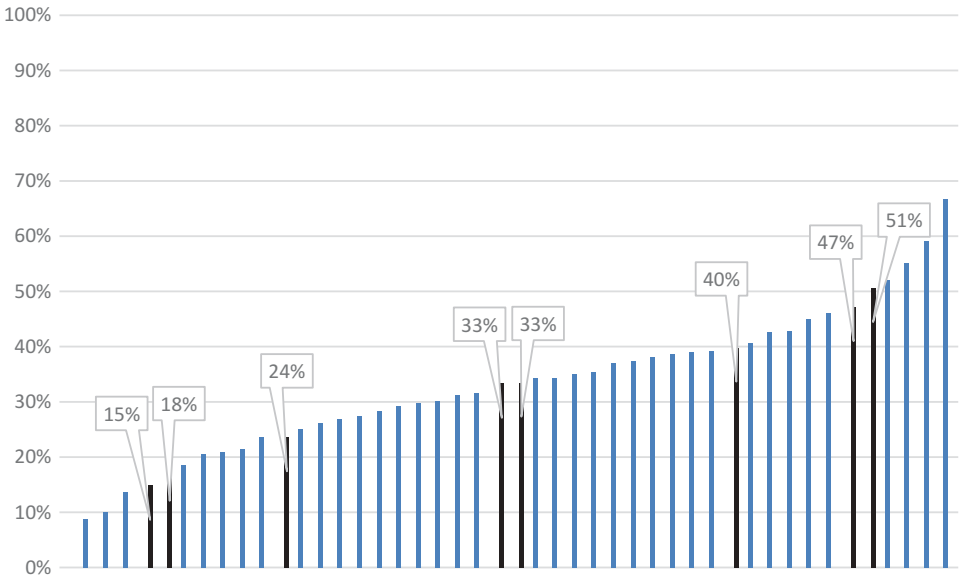

Figure 1. Percent of district middle school students reporting Academic Teasing in the 2017 data set (N = 16,890). The item reads: 'In this class, students get teased for making mistakes'. Percentage values indicate different prevalence in the 10th, 50th and 90th percentiles.

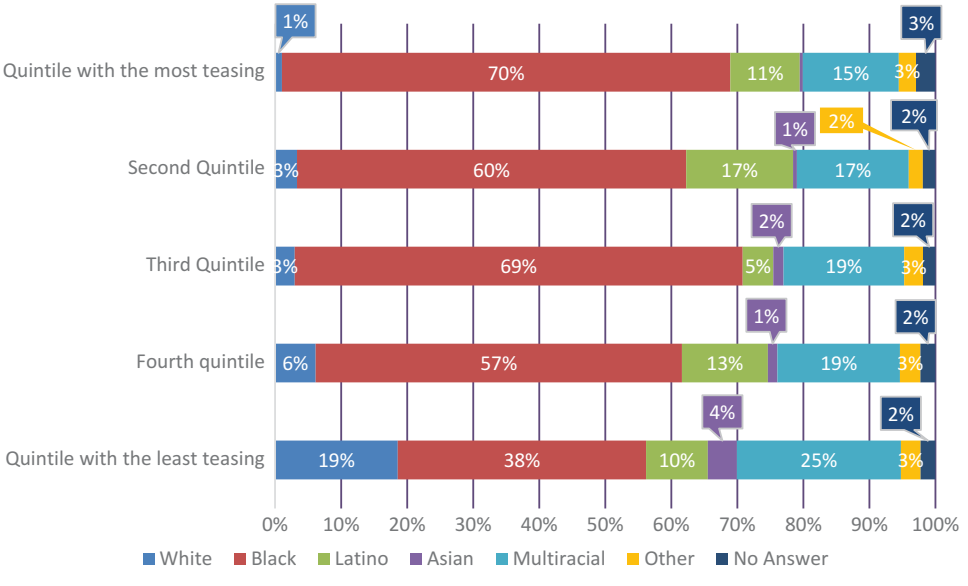

Figure 2. Percent of different ethnic student groups in schools with low to thigh teasing rates in the 2017 data set (N = 16,890). The schools in the bottom quintile have the lowest teasing rates while the schools in the top quintile have the most teasing.

The results also support the idea that perceived peer pressure is more severe among Black students (Model 2, Table 2). The frequency of reported peer pressure strongly increases with the number of Black students (0.69 standard deviation, $p < .001$), Asian students (0.62 standard deviation, $p < .05$), and students from the *other ethnicity*-category (1.60 standard deviation, $p < .001$), controlling for SES- and gender student body composition.

Table 2. HLM-analysis of the predictive power of teasing and peer-pressure on hiding effort and holding back effort while controlling for student body composition in the 2012–15 data set.

	(1) Predicting Teasing	(2) Predicting Peer-Pressure	(3) Predicting Hiding Effort	(4) Predicting Holding Back
VARIABLES	*Main Predictors*	*Main Predictors*	*Main Predictors*	*Main Predictors*
Academic Teasing			0.334***	0.407***
			(0.0179)	(0.0182)
			Controls	*Controls*
% Black	1.172***	0.689***	0.324*	0.350*
	(0.0564)	(0.149)	(0.134)	(0.139)
% Hispanic	0.00372	−0.298	0.0337	0.0858
	(0.0920)	(0.200)	(0.178)	(0.186)
% Asian	0.147	0.619*	0.0661	1.050***
	(0.0997)	(0.292)	(0.272)	(0.279)
% Other Ethnicity	0.904***	1.599***	0.865***	1.463***
	(0.0889)	(0.277)	(0.260)	(0.261)
% Multi-Ethnic	0.637***	0.113	0.0178	0.0821
	(0.0656)	(0.147)	(0.136)	(0.138)
	Controls	*Controls*		
% Books 0–10	−0.640***	−1.152***	−0.766***	−0.776***
	(0.0832)	(0.200)	(0.187)	(0.189)
% Books 11–24	−0.947***	−1.965***	−1.093***	−1.359***
	(0.0816)	(0.203)	(0.191)	(0.192)
% Books 24–99	−1.113***	−1.472***	−0.770***	−1.079***
	(0.0684)	(0.173)	(0.163)	(0.164)
% Books 100–250	−0.656***	−1.336***	−0.0908	−0.739***
	(0.0728)	(0.192)	(0.182)	(0.183)
% Books 250+	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
% Computers 3+	−0.232**	−0.165	−0.437*	−0.167
	(0.0785)	(0.200)	(0.187)	(0.188)
% Computers 2	−0.356***	−0.509*	−0.124	−0.252
	(0.0814)	(0.209)	(0.196)	(0.197)
% Computers 1	−0.432***	−0.101	−0.112	0.0521
	(0.0769)	(0.198)	(0.186)	(0.187)
% Computers 0	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
% Parent Education 18+	−0.189***	−0.304*	−0.185	−0.197^{+}
	(0.0496)	(0.123)	(0.115)	(0.115)
% Parent Education 16	−0.00104	−0.121	−0.269*	−0.245*
	(0.0458)	(0.117)	(0.110)	(0.111)
% Parent Education 14	−0.187***	−0.381**	−0.488***	−0.495***
	(0.0462)	(0.117)	(0.110)	(0.110)
% Parent Education 12	−0.270***	−0.375***	−0.233**	−0.236**
	(0.0385)	(0.0954)	(0.0898)	(0.0901)
% Parent Education <12	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
% English Home 4	0.560***	0.226	0.316^{+}	−0.0943
	(0.0753)	(0.179)	(0.165)	(0.166)
% English Home 3	0.450***	0.286	0.232	−0.0947
	(0.0925)	(0.228)	(0.214)	(0.215)
% English Home 2	0.339***	0.604**	0.171	0.102
	(0.0864)	(0.218)	(0.204)	(0.206)
% English Home 1	0.170^{+}	−0.380^{+}	−0.163	0.0671
	(0.0896)	(0.209)	(0.197)	(0.197)
% English Home 0	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
75–10% Dad Home	−0.153***	−0.272**	−0.325***	−0.204*
	(0.0386)	(0.0965)	(0.0907)	(0.0909)
50–74% Dad Home	−0.0862*	−0.160^{+}	−0.204**	−0.128
	(0.0345)	(0.0836)	(0.0784)	(0.0787)
25–49% Dad Home	0.00310	−0.0292	−0.108	−0.0442
	(0.0311)	(0.0779)	(0.0732)	(0.0734)
0–24% Dad Home	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted

(*Continued*)

Table 2. (Continued).

VARIABLES	(1) Predicting Teasing *Main Predictors*	(2) Predicting Peer-Pressure *Main Predictors*	(3) Predicting Hiding Effort *Main Predictors*	(4) Predicting Holding Back *Main Predictors*
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
0–39% Male	−0.356***	−0.267***	−0.179***	−0.0276
	(0.0198)	(0.0508)	(0.0478)	(0.0480)
40–59% Male	−0.160***	−0.129**	−0.139***	−0.0314
	(0.0163)	(0.0423)	(0.0398)	(0.0399)
60–100% Male	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Constant	0.932***	1.838***	1.367***	1.369***
	(0.0898)	(0.220)	(0.204)	(0.208)
Observations	16,991	2,606	2,608	2,607

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $^{+}$ $p < 0.1$

The relationship of academic teasing and self-sabotaging behaviors

Academic teasing is significantly related to academically self-sabotaging behaviors among students (Table 2). The effect sizes of academic teasing on hiding academic effort (0.33 standard deviation, $p < .001$) and of academic teasing on holding back academic effort (0.41 standard deviation, $p < .001$) are small to medium and highly significant, controlling for student body composition.

Teaching styles predict academic teasing

Regression analyses of the relationship between academic teasing and the Tripod 7Cs components from 2012–15 reveal that academic teasing is less common in schools with highly effective teachers. Even though all 7Cs components are statistically significant, Classroom Management (standardized coefficient = −.54) and Clarify (standardized coefficient = −.37) are the two strongest predictors of low academic teasing rates (Table 3). In other words, academic teasing is lowest in classrooms where teachers are particularly effective in fostering orderly, respectful, and on-task classroom behavior (Classroom Management), and in helping students understand content and resolve their confusion (Clarify).

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that academic teasing, like other forms of malicious teasing and bullying, has negative consequences on academic outcomes, because students who hold back on academic effort are more likely to struggle academically (Hornstra, Majoor, & Peetsma, 2017). If students hide their academic effort in school, teachers might come to believe that they have a disregard for school. Research suggests that teachers' negative assumptions and stereotypes about some minority students' behavior can lead to severe conflicts between minority students and teachers, and result in disproportionately high suspension rates for minority students (Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton, 2016).

The reasons for the disproportionate concentration of some ethnic groups in high-academic teasing classrooms are still largely unclear. However, the results of this study suggest that they are partially due to ethnic differences in negative peer pressure, which might be due to *pluralistic ignorance* (Berkowitz, 2004). Pluralistic ignorance occurs when the majority of students believe that negative peer norms and values (such as teasing peers for making mistakes) are considered 'cool' and adjust their behavior accordingly when, in fact, most of the same students would actually prefer positive norms and values (such as working hard to get good grades) to be 'cool'. Hence, one interpretation of the finding that students of color report more peer pressure and

Table 3. Regression analysis of the relationship between academic teasing and the tripod 7Cs components in the 2012–15 data set.

VARIABLES	(1) Composite	(2) Care	(3) Confer	(4) Captivate	(5) Clarify	(6) Consolidate	(7) Challenge	(8) Classroom Management
7Cs Composite	−0.398***							
	(0.00599)							
Care		−0.319***						
		(0.00611)						
Confer			−0.316***					
			(0.00625)					
Captivate				−0.332***				
				(0.00615)				
Clarify					−0.366***			
					(0.00608)			
Consolidate						−0.315***		
						(0.00619)		
Challenge							−0.330***	
							(0.00630)	
Cl. Management								−0.543***
								(0.00598)
% Black	1.141***	1.173***	1.194***	1.151***	1.178***	1.214***	1.200***	0.776***
	(0.0495)	(0.0522)	(0.0519)	(0.0515)	(0.0505)	(0.0523)	(0.0517)	(0.0444)
% Hispanic	0.118	0.0299	0.106	0.0667	0.125	0.102	0.135	0.0834
	(0.0801)	(0.0844)	(0.0844)	(0.0838)	(0.0816)	(0.0847)	(0.0834)	(0.0729)
% Asian	0.158+	0.109	0.168+	0.142	0.158+	0.0674	0.167+	0.306***
	(0.0876)	(0.0919)	(0.0921)	(0.0915)	(0.0892)	(0.0923)	(0.0911)	(0.0804)
% Other Ethnicity	0.809***	0.887***	0.884***	0.837***	0.811***	0.867***	0.748***	0.689***
	(0.0776)	(0.0817)	(0.0819)	(0.0813)	(0.0791)	(0.0820)	(0.0808)	(0.0715)
% Multi-Ethnic	0.364***	0.444***	0.473***	0.424***	0.411***	0.414***	0.447***	0.298***
	(0.0576)	(0.0605)	(0.0606)	(0.0602)	(0.0587)	(0.0608)	(0.0599)	(0.0530)
% Books 250+	−0.237**	−0.390***	−0.342***	−0.320***	−0.312***	−0.444***	−0.313***	−0.0562
	(0.0743)	(0.0774)	(0.0777)	(0.0770)	(0.0756)	(0.0776)	(0.0774)	(0.0684)
% Books 100–249	−0.516***	−0.701***	−0.674***	−0.640***	−0.606***	−0.733***	−0.523***	−0.270***
	(0.0730)	(0.0759)	(0.0762)	(0.0756)	(0.0743)	(0.0762)	(0.0762)	(0.0673)
% Books 24–99	−0.710***	−0.887***	−0.880***	−0.836***	−0.753***	−0.869***	−0.707***	−0.575***
	(0.0612)	(0.0636)	(0.0638)	(0.0633)	(0.0623)	(0.0639)	(0.0639)	(0.0563)
% Books 11–24	−0.297***	−0.431***	−0.460***	−0.397***	−0.313***	−0.366***	−0.300***	−0.362***
	(0.0651)	(0.0677)	(0.0679)	(0.0674)	(0.0663)	(0.0681)	(0.0679)	(0.0599)
% Books 0–10	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
% Computers 3+	−0.393***	−0.380***	−0.350***	−0.372***	−0.378***	−0.402***	−0.332***	−0.252***
	(0.0699)	(0.0729)	(0.0731)	(0.0724)	(0.0712)	(0.0732)	(0.0728)	(0.0640)
% Computers 2	−0.413***	−0.419***	−0.414***	−0.401***	−0.412***	−0.435***	−0.396***	−0.284***
	(0.0725)	(0.0756)	(0.0758)	(0.0751)	(0.0739)	(0.0759)	(0.0756)	(0.0666)
% Computers 1	−0.429***	−0.438***	−0.455***	−0.420***	−0.437***	−0.439***	−0.435***	−0.368***
	(0.0685)	(0.0714)	(0.0716)	(0.0710)	(0.0698)	(0.0716)	(0.0713)	(0.0630)
% Computers 0	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
% Parent Education >18	−0.105*	−0.151**	−0.129**	−0.145**	−0.120**	−0.138**	−0.0858+	−0.0778+
	(0.0442)	(0.0461)	(0.0462)	(0.0458)	(0.0450)	(0.0462)	(0.0460)	(0.0406)
% Parent Education 16	0.0193	−0.0159	0.0168	0.0191	0.0157	0.00258	0.0155	0.0885*
	(0.0408)	(0.0425)	(0.0426)	(0.0423)	(0.0415)	(0.0426)	(0.0425)	(0.0376)
% Parent Education 14	−0.120**	−0.187***	−0.126**	−0.164***	−0.125**	−0.143***	−0.113**	−0.0460
	(0.0412)	(0.0429)	(0.0430)	(0.0427)	(0.0419)	(0.0430)	(0.0429)	(0.0379)
% Parent Education 12	−0.187***	−0.227***	−0.225***	−0.204***	−0.175***	−0.180***	−0.185***	−0.240***
	(0.0343)	(0.0357)	(0.0358)	(0.0355)	(0.0349)	(0.0359)	(0.0357)	(0.0316)
% Parent Education <12	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
% English Home 4	0.536***	0.578***	0.586***	0.588***	0.531***	0.566***	0.487***	0.413***
	(0.0671)	(0.0699)	(0.0701)	(0.0695)	(0.0683)	(0.0701)	(0.0699)	(0.0617)
% English Home 3	0.408***	0.437***	0.411***	0.453***	0.434***	0.439***	0.383***	0.345***
	(0.0823)	(0.0859)	(0.0861)	(0.0853)	(0.0839)	(0.0861)	(0.0858)	(0.0756)
% English Home 2	0.233**	0.280***	0.255**	0.318***	0.247**	0.278***	0.235**	0.138+
	(0.0769)	(0.0802)	(0.0804)	(0.0797)	(0.0784)	(0.0805)	(0.0801)	(0.0708)

(*Continued*)

Table 3. (Continued).

VARIABLES	(1) Composite	(2) Care	(3) Confer	(4) Captivate	(5) Clarify	(6) Consolidate	(7) Challenge	(8) Classroom Management
% English Home 1	0.0316	0.0562	0.0751	0.0712	0.0258	0.0487	0.0654	0.108
	(0.0798)	(0.0832)	(0.0835)	(0.0827)	(0.0813)	(0.0835)	(0.0831)	(0.0735)
% English Home 0	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
75–10% Dad Home	−0.0617+	−0.0949**	−0.101**	−0.0722*	−0.0693*	−0.112**	−0.0694+	−0.0333
	(0.0344)	(0.0358)	(0.0359)	(0.0356)	(0.0350)	(0.0359)	(0.0358)	(0.0316)
50–74% Dad Home	−0.0432	−0.0588+	−0.0664*	−0.0429	−0.0465	−0.0626+	−0.0378	−0.0529+
	(0.0307)	(0.0320)	(0.0321)	(0.0319)	(0.0313)	(0.0321)	(0.0320)	(0.0282)
25–49% Dad Home	0.0150	0.0122	0.00601	0.0222	0.0166	0.0143	0.0246	−0.0233
	(0.0277)	(0.0289)	(0.0290)	(0.0288)	(0.0283)	(0.0290)	(0.0289)	(0.0255)
0–24% Dad Home	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
0–39% Male	−0.329***	−0.360***	−0.319***	−0.366***	−0.339***	−0.356***	−0.326***	−0.244***
	(0.0176)	(0.0184)	(0.0184)	(0.0183)	(0.0179)	(0.0184)	(0.0184)	(0.0163)
40–59% Male	−0.151***	−0.172***	−0.141***	−0.181***	−0.154***	−0.146***	−0.132***	−0.141***
	(0.0145)	(0.0151)	(0.0152)	(0.0151)	(0.0148)	(0.0152)	(0.0151)	(0.0134)
60–100% Male	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Constant	0.542***	0.760***	0.675***	0.667***	0.581***	0.709***	0.498***	0.406***
	(0.0776)	(0.0817)	(0.0820)	(0.0816)	(0.0790)	(0.0821)	(0.0809)	(0.0716)
Observations	16,991	16,991	16,989	16,988	16,991	16,991	16,991	16,991
Number of groups	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $^{+}$ $p < 0.1$

academic teasing than White students, is that students of color engage in academic teasing to gain recognition among their peers of color. However, due to pluralistic ignorance, this does not necessarily mean that students of color approve of such negative behavior when asked privately and anonymously. In fact, previous research indicates that Black students do not value academic success any less than White students (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005).

Another explanation of ethnic differences in reported peer pressure and academic teasing might be that some students of color are more likely to experience lower quality of teaching (Desimone & Long, 2010), which in turn translates to more negative peer norms and behavior over time (Gest, Madill, Zadzora, Miller, & Rodkin, 2014). Classroom Management and Clarify skills are the strongest negative predictors of academic teasing in classrooms, suggesting that confusion among students and disrespectful relationship climates are among the root causes of teasing for making mistakes. Hence, teachers must realize the crucial value of making sure that all students in the classroom can follow the material, and that everyone is treated with respect. Students react with frustration and bad behavior – such as academic teasing – when relationship climates in classrooms are poor, and when they are left behind academically.

Limitations

The analyses in this paper have several limitations. First, the Tripod survey data are cross-sectional, hence they cannot prove causality. Second, all measures of student behavior (i.e. academic teasing, hiding academic effort, and holding back academic effort) are based on subjective perceptions, which might deviate from actual behavior. Third, all measures of student behavior are single-item indices – multi-item indices would have been preferable but are not available in the Tripod survey data. Fourth, the data are not nationally representative – all inferences to other regions (in- and outside the United States) should be made cautiously.

Implications

Several important implications can be inferred from the findings of this study. First, the concentration of some minority groups in high-academic teasing environments is concerning because students appear to respond to academic teasing climates with academically self-sabotaging behaviors. This likely exacerbates ethnic achievement gaps. Education leaders concerned about ethnic achievement gaps need to start paying close attention to academic teasing. Second, interventions that are designed to overcome pluralistic ignorance might help students create more positive peer group norms and values (Youth culture and the conspiracy to succeed, 2017; Berkowitz, 2004), and could therefore be effective against academic teasing. Future research is needed to test this hypothesis. Third, teachers whose classrooms have high-level academic teasing climates need support. The results of this study suggest that professional development focused on classroom management and clarification skills may be particularly helpful for reducing academic teasing. Finally, teachers tend to generally underestimate the impact of teasing behavior (Landau, 2001). Professional teacher training needs to stress that the negative effects of teasing, and academic teasing in particular, should not be underestimated.

Summary

The analyses in this study suggest that academic teasing is highly prevalent in middle schools, and students' ethnic background is a strong predictor of exposure to high levels of academic-teasing. Alarmingly, students in such negative school climates are more likely to engage in self-sabotaging behavior, including hiding and holding back academic effort. Such behavior undermines academic achievement and likely exacerbates ethnic achievement gaps. Encouragingly, analyses also suggest that better teaching skills, in particular, classroom management and the ability to explain things clearly, reduce academic teasing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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